The Universal Wolf: A Vicious New Version of Little Red Riding Hood. A Faux French Comedy of Menace
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JOAN M. SCHENKAR

THE UNIVERSAL WOLF: A VICIOUS NEW VERSION OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

A FAUX FRENCH COMEDY OF MENACE

A little proscenium stage with red velvet curtains. It sits on the larger stage like a telephone booth or a police box—and carries with it the same sense of endangered isolation. Audience SR is a table and chair.

The READER sits in the chair waiting to begin the play. The READER will read all the stage directions that the actors can't, won't, or don't do. The READER will also create the voices of the structuralists, the bird, the post-structuralists, the audience, the stagehands, and LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S MOTHER. The READER is very lightly miked.

PART 1. LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD appears on the stage apron in a field of wild flowers, carrying a wicker basket. Since the play has not yet begun, her presence is a little insubstantial.

LITTLE R: Oooooo. How pretty. How pretty.

From offstage, an exclamation: "!!!!"

LITTLE R: I'm coming, maman.

Another exclamation: "!!!!!!"

LITTLE R: I'm *coming*, maman. I have just to collect one last item for dear grandmother's little basket. (cheep cheep) Here birdie birdie. Come birdie birdie. How good you would look in a pâte brisé. (cheep cheep) Here birdie birdie. Come birdie birdie. Perhaps you would be more comfortable in a tarte tatin? That's right birdie, perch yourself on my finger. (cheep) What a lovely little birdie. (cheep cheep cheep) (to the audience) Now watch this. This, too, will be lovely.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD wrings the birdie's neck—"cheep cheep URK"—and exits, laughing an insupportably silvery little laugh. The house lights go down. A hairy paw parts the tiny velvet curtains. Voilà! The head of a

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wolf emerges! Authentic teeth, authentic fur, authentic everything. Except the accent, which is the accent of Maurice Chevalier.

M. WOOLF: Bon soir, mesdames et messieurs. Bon soir. (sings)

I am ze Wolf Aoow Aoww
I am ze Wolf Aoow Aooow
I am ze 'orrible terrible
Creature zat lurks in your
Dreams when you scream
In your bed are you dead?
I am ze Wolf
Aowww. Aowww

Bon soir. I am M. Woolf, a votre service. (snarrl yeowll, snap, snap, drool). Oh, excusez-moi, pardon, pardon. Forgive me, mesdames et messieurs. I 'ave a 'ard time to keep control when it comes to ze saying of my last name. Wiz your permission I will try it anozzer time. Woo . . . Wooo . . . Woooo . . . Woooolff! (snarrl, yowl, yeeowll). A thousand pardons again good people. (a silk handkerchief dries the jaw). It is such an inflammatory last name, non? So, 'ow do you say, provocatif? But it 'as a certaine ring, do you not agree? A résonnance of long white teeth and croque-messieurs made wiz ze fingers of five-year-old-cheeldren (snarrrl, arrrl, arrrl, snap!). Nom de dieu! I see I can keep nozzing from you tonight, good people. (a toothy grin, a resettling of intentions). Mesdames et messieurs. A small confession. I love to devour leetle cheeldren. (smack smack drool) Oui, monsieur, I assure you I speak only ze truth. Devouring leetle cheeldren is my mission in life. Mon destin. I do not choose it, it chooses me. For petit dejeuner I like ze five-year-olds (smack smack), for lunch ze nine-to-twelves, and for mon diner ze teenagers are always appropriate. And because, like all ze moderne French (left paw on left hip), I am *structuraliste*, ze meaning of my obsession wiz cheeldren 'as no meaning for me. I eat cheeldren raw and I eat zem cooked. Ça y est.

The image of Claude Lévi-Strauss appears behind M. WOOLF. It holds up an enormous carte de visite labelled MYTHS ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF COOKING, then gently fades away.

M. WOOLF: I can substitute one child for anozzer, I can change *zere* names, I can change *my* name (a graceful shrug of lupine shoulders). It is all ze same to me, so long 'as I 'ave my leetle collation.

The image of Roland Barthes appears in an armchair, deliberately crosses its legs and says: "An eminently structural object is created by two modest actions: *substitution* (one part replaces another as in a paradigm) and *nomination* (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts)." The image uncrosses its legs and is instantly replaced by the velvet curtain.

M. WOOLF: You see good people. It is merely a question of application. Ze right part for ze right part. Ze bon dieu gave me zees lovely teeth—ze better to

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eat leetle limbs wiz—and (a hairy paw taps a canine) Aowwww! Oh zat hurrts! Pardon! Aooowww! Aooowwrrr! Zis tooth must be replaced! (the silk handkerchief comes out and dries the jaw).To continue, bon gens. You are 'ere tonight to witness the reenactment of a leetle meet. Mit? Meeth? I *cannot* say zis word but you understand me, non? I come to you in a mytology. Zere are many people in zis room right now who think zey know how my small story will end. Eh? Am I right? Of course I am right. You see (mouths the words, he's not going to lose control) M. Woolf, you think fairy tale. And *zen* you think of ze Little Red Hood wiz 'er cape and 'er basket and 'er benign grandmozzer in bed. Suddenly ze image of M. Woolf wiz 'is teeth (a coy display of dentition) appears on ze screen of memory. Quel horreur! Eh? And *zen* you remember ze 'appy ending of your violent American childhoods. Ze brave Woodsman comes wiz 'is gleaming axe and commits an 'orrible vivisection upon ze suffering protagonist. Well *zat* was ze version of ze brothers Grimm. Ze *German* version. Germans love to—'ow you say—compensate for zere national crimes and terrible cameras wiz 'eroic avoidances of ze *real*. But we French—anozzer style entirely. We French always—'ow do your American gangsters call it—face ze musique.

The image of Alain Robbe-Grillet appears looking through a pair of binoculars. It says: "Metaphor is never an innocent figure of speech," then drops its binoculars and vanishes.

M. WOOLF: And so tonight good people you will see ze French version of ze Little Red One. Tonight we will remove entirely ze concept of ze Woodsman from ze narratif and—'ow do your American landlords call it—*renovate* zis little story. For wizout ze Woodsman, wizout ze 'eroic male, zis simple tale returns to its sixteenth-century spirit—bestiale, brutale, and très très primitif. Tonight, mesdames et messieurs (flourish of an imaginary cape) M. *Woolf* (snarrrl, yowl, owl, howwwll) will be ze only male on ze stage!!

The image of Julia Kristeva appears holding a glass of chartreuse. It sips and says: "Narrative is, in sum, the most elaborate attempts of the speaking subject to situate his or herself among his or her desires or taboos, that is at the interior of the Oedipal triangle. . . . oooops!" The glass falls to the floor, the image disappears.

The velvet curtains fold around M. WOOLF and, in the place where his teeth just were, the charming face of a charming LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD appears. Curls, big eyes, dimpled cheeks, cupid's mouth, cleft chin, the works. The face is framed by a red velvet hood and smiles insupportably.

LITTLE R: Bon soir, tout le monde. I am Little Red Riding Hood, preparing to visit the house of my dear grandmother in the middle of the deep, dark, Bois de Boulogne. My grandmother (a toss of the curls) is the extraordinary person who gave me this little red hood which I wear everywhere and by which I am everywhere known (another insupportable smile). You will notice that I speak American quite perfectly. But you must not feel badly about that. *I* have two languages and *you* have only one. This is life. This is also the result of the

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superior training all French children receive in their little lycées—where it is understood that Americans can speak no language but their own. For language, as everyone knows, is an ability limited to the happy few—most of whom dwell in my country. The happy few . . . the happy few. This is a phrase I once read and liked very much. The "happy few." It makes me think of my dear grandmother as well as myself for my grandmother is *also* a very unusual person . . . (an insupportable smile).

From offstage, a question: "??"

LITTLE R: Yes, maman. I *do* have my little wicker basket.

Another question: "??"

LITTLE R: No maman. Grandmère asked for fresh meat and *five* bottles of blackberry wine.

An exclamation: "!!!"

LITTLE R: Grandmère does not have a *problem* with blackberry wine, maman. She *loves* blackberry wine.

Another exclamation: "!!!!"

LITTLE R: Maman. Grandmère is a *professional* woman and would be *very* sorry to hear you speak about her in this way. Especially to me. (to the audience) My mother, unfortunately, is not a spiritually inclined person. Quand même, she is my mother and for that I must respect her.

A statement: "."

LITTLE R: No maman. You can be sure that I will not put my foot off the path to grandmother's house.

A question and an exclamation: "?!"

LITTLE R: Yes maman. I *do* remember hearing stories of Big Bad M. Woolf.

Snarrl, Owll, Howlll, Yeowl, Arff! is heard from behind the curtain. A stagehand screams: "Hold his *paws*, fa chrissake! Hold his jaws!! I never *seen* a stage wolf behave like that! *Grab* the sonofabitch, willya, *it's not his cue*!! Aooooooowwww!

LITTLE R: Believe me, maman. Though I have not the smallest idea of what M. Woolf looks like, his presence is so real to me that I imagine I can hear him howling outside our door at this very instant. Can *you* not hear him, maman? I am certain it is M. Woo . . .

M. WOOLF bursts through the curtains, his fur very disturbed. The heads of M. WOOLF and LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD appear simultaneously for a nanno-second, there is a (dramatically) unrealized "incident," and the little head of LITTLE RED quickly withdraws.

M. WOOLF: Woolf! (arf arf snarrl) Woolf! (arll yeowl yargh) Oh pardonnez-moi, mesdames et messieurs. It is ze sound of my own name zat rouses ze beast in me. I meant, naturellement, only to complete ze charming child's sentence wiz ze word . . . (wurgh! worf! wlugh! M. WOOLF stifles himself with a right paw). Please! Please! Charming Child! Come back I beg of you! Non? She is disconcerted for ze moment, ladies and gentlemen, but I assure

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you zere is more to 'er story. You 'ave not seen ze last of ze Little Red One, I promise you zat. What? What do you say, madame? You 'ave no sympathy wiz my little faux pas, madame? You cannot yourself imagine losing control, you think it is not in you to 'owl and yeowl like M. W. . . . like me. Hah! It *is* in you, madame. Listen to ze sounds your own stomach makes ze next time you are 'ungry. Growl 'owl 'owl is what you will 'ear. Ze beast within, ze (mouths the word) wolf inside. Make no mistake, madame. Zere is a wolf in you and 'e wants to get out.

Howwl! Yeowl! Yeeowwll! M. WOOLF outdoes himself in the vocal department. A burly arm thrusts through the curtains, hammerlocks M. WOOLF's neck, and drags him offstage. "Awright, awright, I *got* the sonofabitch, but I don't know how long I can *hold* him."

The image of Jacques Lacan appears in academic garb, smoking a pipe. It assumes a speaking position, attempts to remove the pipe from its mouth, fails completely, and dissolves in embarrassment.

A childish, dimpled, waving hand appears through the curtains.

LITTLE R: Hello again, good people. Tout va bien. I am back and maman is resting. (a slight, duplicitous smile) To be accurate (a bright smile), maman is fainted. She insisted to believe that it was really the Big Bad Wolf who brushed past me in the doorway just now, and frightened herself into fits. In any case, she is now, as you phrase it in Hollywood, out of the picture—so I can share with you the *very* naughty thing I am about to do (a coy, coy, giggle).

In the audience we hear rude sounds in the gustatory mode—lip smacks, drools, a few low, appetitive whistles. LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD stamps her little red riding foot.

LITTLE R: No no *no!* Not *that! Shame* on you. And *you*. And *you,* sir. And that man *there* in the raincoat who just made a crude gesture at me! Such a thing would *never ever* happen in my own country. *Never*!

From the back of the hall: "Salope!" LITTLE RED resettles with effort.

LITTLE R: What I was referring to as "naughty," good people, was my excursion through the deep, dark, Bois de Boulogne, for the walk to the house of my grandmother is full of horrible dangers. There is a perpetual rotation of picknickers, vendors, and unattached males watching for evil opportunities. Quand même, a walk once a week in the Bois fills me with fresh air and favorable feelings. And from time to time, I come upon the charming Woodsman of the Bois, leaning on his *remarkably* shaped axe—who always has a kind word for a little girl in a red hood bringing a basket of comfort to her dear grandmother.

From the back of the hall: "Salope!" again. Also: "Dwarf! Dwarf! *Boring* dwarf!" LITTLE RED's embouchère tightens firmly. Someone in front shouts: "Where's the *wolf*?" Snarrrl! Yowl! Yyrrr! "My cue," says LITTLE RED and she hastens on her way as a hairy snout once again thrusts itself through the curtains. "*My* cue," says M. WOOLF. "Mon *entrance,* mesdames et messieurs." Snarrl! Owl! Urg! M. WOOLF is *aggrieved.*

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M. WOOLF: *Forget* ze woodsman, dear peopole, *and* 'is axe. Banish ze brawny 'ero from your mind. We 'ave dissolved 'is function by removing 'im from zis narrative. Zere is at present no one to rescue and no one to *be* rescued. Ze danger in zis leetle story is now a much more subtle matter. Am I right? Of *course* I am right. Ze narrator is *always* right. Now for ze worthless woodsman we 'ave substituted zis wonderful chart.

A hairy arm inserts a large white bristol board through the curtains. The board is fastened to a stick and appears to be completely blank.

M. WOOLF: We 'ave substituted zis chart for ze negligible woodsman, good people, because we French do not ever remove something wizzout replacing it. And, in any case, wizzout ze false 'ero, Little Red Riding 'ood's little red story begins to resemble—may I say it good people?—ze most mysterious encounter given to ze entire race of 'umans. (a dramatic flourish of the paw towards the bristol board) Wizzout ze woodsman, my friends, ze story of ze Little Red One come to approach zat terrible collision of 'umanity and 'opelessness known as Le Néant. Nozzingness. Absolute Existential Zero!!!

And the bristol board is rotated on its stick to reveal what is printed on its backside in big red letters punctured and dripping cocktail sauce: ZERO. Hideous shrieks from the audience.

M. WOOLF: Mon Dieu! Madame! Madame! Au succours! Au succours! Somebody must 'elp ze poor fainted lady in ze first row! And ze fainted ones in ze fifth, seventh, and ninth rows! And there in the aisle a gentleman is 'aving a 'orrible serious 'eart attack! Sssshhhh! Sssssshhh! Good people. Shrieking is of no use in zis situation and merely interrupts my attempt to deconstruct ze narrative and penetrate its mysteries. Silence mesdames! Control yourselves messieurs! Think of your mothers!

The image of Julia Kristeva appears with a glass of armagnac. The image grips the glass tightly and says: "By maternal I mean the ambivalent principle that derives on the one hand from the species and on the other from a catastrophe of identity." The image disappears, followed, more slowly, by the armagnac.

M. WOOLF: Look again at zis sign, good people and tell me what you see. A smooth (M. WOOLF says smooze) white nacreous surface, eh? Not unlike ze concept of Existential Blank. And notice ze sharply cut edges of ze board—'ow it recalls ze serious side of an axe—eh? And ze wooden 'andle 'ere—a representation both of what ze removed woodsman chops wiz *and* of what 'e chops. Zis sign, ladies and gentlemen, is not merely a sign. It is a SIGN and we must take it *very* seriously. (the ears of M. WOOLF prick up) Aha! My big ears 'ave just detected sounds of ze Little Red One picking forbidden flowers. Ssshh. Ssshh. If you are very quiet you can 'ear 'er too. (M. WOOLF assumes his most factitiously welcoming smile.)

Tum te tum. Offstage LITTLE RED is singing.

LITTLE R: I pluck the flowers
For grandmère
I bottle the buds

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For her drink
I gather berries
For grandmère
And crush them
And squeeze them
And dirty the sink
For my grandmère loves to see dying
Little ones struggling in pain
Puppies in ponds
Cats flat on the road
Bunnies in traps
A badly squashed toad
Are part of her fav-o-rite view
For ma chère
Grandmère
(and here LITTLE RED glares straight at the audience)
I'd even kill *you* and *you*.

M. WOOLF: Et voilà, mesdames. Regardez messieurs. Is it not as I said?

LITTLE R: Oh my oh my. How very familiar you look, monsieur. And yet you are not the Woodsman with the remarkable axe. No no you are certainly *not* the Woodsman I know. But perhaps you are *another* Woodsman? A . . . (she looks closely) hairier, damper Woodsman?

M. WOOLF makes a surreptitious attempt to smooth his arm fur, then whisks his handkerchief across his dripping lower jaw. He summons a reliable smile.

LITTLE R: And if you *are* another Woodsman, monsieur, you will know the path to the house of my dear grandmother and you will direct me to it. (and here LITTLE RED quavers a bit) For I seem, good M. Woodsman, to have . . . just a little . . . lost my way.

M. WOOLF: Lost, chère mlle.? Lost? Oh do not say it. Though these woods are deep, dark, and threatened with meaninglessness, you are surely not lost. For, charming child (an assessing glance) in the 11- to 15-year-old category, you have found *me*. Me! Moi, M. Wooo (the WOLF grabs his snout and censors himself just in time) Woods. Ready, willing and able to shine ze bright light of my attentions on your leetle probleme.

M. WOOLF broadens his smile and a little string of saliva appears at the SR corner of his lower jaw. From the seventh row of the audience comes a warning: "Dwarf, dwarf, ya *dumb dwarf*. He's gonna *eat* you."

LITTLE R: You are not, then, a Woodsman, kind sir? You are only M. Woods?

M. WOOLF: Ah, charming child. Your beautiful youth must be ze excuse for your ignorance. Zere is no longer a woodsman in your leetle story. Ze woodsman was a crude protuberance, an ugly thorn in ze primrose path of our leetle meet. Meeth. Myt. You know what I mean. A fiction with résonnance. No, zere ees no woodsman, charming child, zere ees only me, alone in all zis wooded space to guide you.

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The image of Gaston Bachelard appears with a postal sack on its back. It removes a card from the sack and reads in a whisper: "Space has always reduced me to silence," then disappears.

LITTLE R: But I *insist* upon a woodsman! I *depend* upon a woodsman! *I must have a woodsman!*

M. WOOLF: Dear child—in an *exceptionally* succulent stage of development—not only is ze woodsman absent from zis recital but I shall personally see to it (and here M. WOOLF smiles a smile of unimaginable wickedness and moisture from his salivary glands finally passes the point of control) zat we do not 'ave even a sweet old grandmozzer to obstruct our wonderful duet. Your grandmozzer will be replaced wiz something *simpler*—something on ze order of zis placard. (and M. WOOLF points to the dripping ZERO)

LITTLE R: That is *ridiculous*, M. Woods! There is *no question* of replacing my remarkable grandmère! Why in her youth grandmother dearest was a *serious professional*—the only female butcher in the Bois de Boulogne! (proudly) Most of the tiny mammals of the Bois have ended their lives on chère grandmère's butcher block. And now, *now* that she is *retired* you wish to *replace* her?! No, no M. Woods, my dear grandmother will *never* be replaced!

M. WOOLF: (a paw raised in placation) I positively take your point, charming child. So, ze old relative 'as a good eye and a steady 'and, zen?

LITTLE R: Better than that, M. Woods. Dear grandmother has a remarkably hard heart. It's a quality which replaces almost every other quality. But, M. Woods, dear *grandmother* will not be replaced *so just get over it!*

M. WOODS: I take your point again, charming child. And by ze way, your command of ze American vernacular is superbe. (slyly) I understand zis ability missed your poor mother entirely.

LITTLE R: I *have* heard that, M. Woods. I *have* heard that maman lacks a certain . . . oh . . . (shrugs) . . . *you* know . . .

M. WOOLF: (top of his form) Ah, my dear child. Zere are sings I could tell you about your poor mozzer, sings only a man of my generation could know—but non, non I *must* not. I *will* not. I *shall* not.

The image of Pierre Louys appears in a Paul Poiret evening gown. It drops a shoulder strap and says: "I will reveal something but not more than is permitted."—then shimmers away.

M. WOOLF: And now, charming child, let me encourage you to collect a few more forbidden blooms for your noble grandmozzer. For I see zat ze bouquet you 'ave assembled for ze old paragon is a little scanty.

LITTLE R: Scanty, monsieur? Is it possible?

M. WOOLF: It ees, darling dryad. As you say, everyone in zis deep, dark, forest knows ze reputation of your extraordinary grandmozzer and no one would begrudge 'er a full bouquet. So take zis leetle corsage from me (and M. WOOLF hands her a blighted blossom), pin it to your cape, and pick ze proscribed posies. Go on, go on! Enjoy yourself! And when you 'ave finished, *zat* is ze way to grandmozzer's 'ouse. (and M. WOOLF turns to the audience with a

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villainous whisper) In ze meantime, I shall snatch zis delectable morsel's leetle basket, arrive at grandmozzer's dwelling, and swallow ze old monster toute entière. Cap, spectacles, ze knitting and, if necessary, argh, ze needles.

LITTLE R: Well, M. Woods. There is justice in what you say. I would not care to approach grandmother dearest with anything less than the best. But I must begin now—for I see that the shadows are getting longer.

A large shadow suddenly extends itself across both M. WOOLF and LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD—and just as suddenly retreats.

LITTLE R: (to the audience) And while this strange man, deluded by my clever story, imagines me picking flowers in a field, I shall run as rapidly as dignity permits to the house of my dear grandmother, using a shortcut known only to me. For in this M. Woods I am smelling a rat. I do not like the way his mouth consistently drips moisture—though, to be sure, I am too polite to say so. (to M. WOOLF) Au revoir, M. Woods. I am on my merry way. Au revoir. (and she forgets her basket as she backs out between the velvet curtains).

M. WOOLF: (wiping his mouth on his sleeve and surreptitiously slurping up the overflow) Slurp slurp. Au revoir, charming child. And 'ow do zey say in American vacationlands, take your time my leetle one. Take your time. Ze forbidden flowers cry out for your attentions. (M. WOOLF whirls 'round to the audience, a different wolf now, every one of his teeth available for viewing). Aooow aaow aoooowww! Ze leetle hors d'oeuvre 'as left 'er basket to assist me in my impersonation! M. Woolf 'as prevailed! Ha! HA! Grandmozzers beware! Leetle girls BEWARE! M. WOOLF (Aooooow!) is on ze loose once again!!!!!!

The same large shadow that fell across M. WOOLF and LITTLE RED falls again, this time accompanied by a piercing electronic chord. The lights darken ominously.

END OF PART 1

ENTRE-ACTE: The curtains part once again. It is M. WOOLF—quiet, focused, pleasant, and quite dry. From offstage we hear the stagehands: "Jesus-god it took two towels to get that wolf's jaw cleaned off! The producer's gonna *croak* when she sees the laundry bills on this show!" "Are you kidding? I hadda stuff a washcloth under his *tongue* so he wouldn't drool all over the *dresser*!" "He's not human, he's just not human." M. WOOLF advances ingratiatingly.

M. WOOLF: I forgot! I forgot one leetle thing, good people. One tiny leetle thing to show you before ze Red One appears wiz yet anozzer side of 'er endless story. Ladies! Open your purses! Gentlemen! Search ze floor! I want ze entire audience to retrieve its programs from wherever zey 'ave been concealed! I will now ask you to . . . 'ow do your American scholars call eet? . . . interact wiz ze texte! 'Ave we all found ze beautiful programmes? Bon. Turn to ze block of

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texte on page 5. You weel notice zat eet comes *after* ze inflated biography of ze playwright and *before* ze pitiful pleas for money by ze theater. On zis page 5, you weel find ze structurally correct version of my story. My story in its primal state *before* ze 'orrible intrusion of ze stupide woodsman. Lights, M. le technicien! Lights eef you please! Of course ze lighting technicien might well be a woman, but in zis dim atmosphere eet is impossible to discern ze gender of *anything*.

At this moment, the image of Teresa de Lauretis appears in full doctoral costume, holding a diploma and weeping. The image raises its right hand and says: "The female sex is invisible in psychology and in semiology it does not exist at all." The house lights come on and Dr. de Lauretis vanishes.

M. WOOLF: Raise your textes to ze light my dears, prepare your minds for a shock, and read. *Read*. To yourselves of course. But *read*.

AUDIENCE READS THE FOLLOWING TEXT:

Page 5

So the wolf took the path of the pins and arrived first at the house. He killed grandmother, poured her blood into a bottle, and sliced her flesh onto a platter. Then he got into her nightclothes and waited in bed.

"Knock, Knock"

"Come in, my dear."

"Hello, grandmother. I've brought you some bread and milk."

"Have something yourself my dear. There is meat and wine in the pantry."

So the little girl ate what she was offered and as she did, a little cat said, "Slut! To eat the flesh and drink the blood of your grandmother!"

Then the wolf said, "Undress and get into bed with me."

"Where shall I put my apron?"

"Throw it on the fire; you won't need it anymore."

For each garment—bodice, skirt, petticoat and stockings—the girl asked the same question; and each time the wolf answered, "Throw it on the fire; you won't need it anymore."

When the girl got in bed, she said, "Oh, grandmother! How hairy you are!"

"It's to keep me warmer, my dear."

"Oh grandmother! What big shoulders you have!"

"It's better for carrying firewood, my dear!"

"Oh grandmother! What long nails you have!"

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"It's for scratching myself better, my dear!"
"Oh grandmother! What big teeth you have!"
"It's for eating you better, my dear."

AND HE ATE HER.

M. WOOLF: (looking around the house) Is zere anyone who 'as not finished? Good. Is zere anyone who missed ze four beautiful words in ze last sentence? "And he ate her"? Good. You now 'ave all ze facts you need. Let ze carnage begin. (and M. WOOLF makes a surprisingly dignified exit).

END OF THE ENTRE-ACTE

PART II: The curtains open wider than they ever have on the same little stage. It is now GRANDMOTHER's house and the decor is that of a retired butcher who might at any moment resume her career. We see chopping blocks, a full set of Sabatiers, and various small mammals hanging by their hindquarters in gruesome disarray. GRANDMOTHER sits in a rocking chair with cap, spectacles, two outsize needles (but no knitting), and a bottle of blackberry wine. She rocks and sips and sings her Grandmother Song.

GRAND M: They think that I'll knit by night
They hope I'll crochet by day
They want their socks mended
Their sad problems ended
Well it won't be by me
Hee hee
Hee hee
No it won't be by me
Not by me.

A loud knocking sound KNOCK KNOCK interrupts GRANDMOTHER's big aria. From offstage we hear: "Grandmother dearest grandmother! Open the door. Oh please please please please please open the door!!"

GRAND M: It's Little Red Riding Hood. For godssake Little Red Riding Hood! Are you blind? (to the audience) She must be blind. The door is open. RAISE THE LATCH. (knocking continues) For godssake Little Red Riding Hood. Are you deaf? (to the audience) She must be deaf. The latch! RAISE THE LATCH!

LITTLE R: (entering) I raised the latch, grandmère . . .

GRAND M: Smart girl. (to the audience) She's coming along.

LITTLE R: . . . and I ran all the way through the Bois de Boulogne (pant pant) to advise you (pant pant) of the arrival of a very suspicious gentleman with moisture around his mouth.

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GRAND M: That will be the wolf, Little Red Riding Hood. I know this story very well.

LITTLE R: (marveling) The moist man with fur on his hands was M. *Woolf! That* was M. WOOLF!!

GRAND M: Sometimes I fear the girl has inherited more traits from her mother than from *me.*

LITTLE R: Do not say it, grandmother dearest! I beg you.

GRAND M: Well sit down and drink with me granddaughter and we'll discuss why I forgot about your visit and what to do about the possible new monsieur.

LITTLE R: I am too young to drink, grandmère. Maman says it is drink that has dissolved your memory.

GRAND M: Drink is the proper partner for meat, Little Red Riding Hood, and it is meat that makes a memory. Or so we butchers always say. (gulp gulp) Now describe the strange monsieur for me. I must see him before I can deal with him.

LITTLE R: (carefully) He was . . . hairy . . . damp . . . unctuous . . . and full of fine phrases.

GRAND M: It's the wolf, all right.

LITTLE R: *Really*, grandmother dearest. That was *really* M. Woolf?!!

GRAND M: Oh for gods*sake* Little Red Riding Hood.

LITTLE R: Well, then, grandmère. M. Woolf is coming to eat us both and with my little basket, too, which in my haste, I abandoned.

GRAND M: *My* little basket you mean. (avariciously) What's in it? *Fresh meat*? Did you put *fresh meat* in my basket?

LITTLE R: Six bottles of blackberry wine, some wilting flowers, and one deceased songbird at the bottom, dear grandmother.

GRAND M: Six bottles! Good for you granddaughter! I detest cut flowers as you well know but the bird is a *wonderful* touch. I'll pop him in a pâte brisé. If I remember. Now in just a moment that *awful* wolf will be at the door trying to imitate *you*, Little Red Riding Hood.

LITTLE R: Is he *that* stupid, grandmother dearest? Or does he think *you're* that stupid?

GRAND M: That is how the story goes, Little Red Riding Hood. At least I *think* that is how the story goes. My memory is as full of holes as a hairnet.

LITTLE R: It's the wine, isn't it grandmère?

GRAND M: (taking a slurp) It's the *meat*, Little Red. It's been days since I've had *fresh meat.* (looks at the bottle) Of course, every pleasure has its penalties. (glug glug glug)

LITTLE R: Well, but dearest grandmère, what are we to *do*?

GRAND M: (taking a slug) I'm *thinking*, Little Red.

LITTLE R: You're *drinking*, grandmère.

GRAND M: The one supports the other (glug glug). Or so we butchers always say.

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LITTLE R: Thank heaven, chère grandmère, that I do not have your responsibilities.

GRAND M: Ha HAH! I've *got* it! The *perfect solution*!

LITTLE R: Oh grandmother. You are certainly the cleverest old person in the Bois de Boulogne! Tell me your solution!

GRAND M: (raises her head to speak, but memory fails) Woops, it's gone! The idea has flown my mind like a bird from a bough! (to herself) Must be a protein deficiency. (to the audience) Old age is a *miracle* of selective consciousness. A *miracle*.

LITTLE R: We are lost! We are lost! Maman was right! You have drunk your mind away!

GRAND M: Stop that gibbering, you brainless child. *No* one is lost! A *solution* is lost, that is all. And in one minute, I will have another. (to the audience) Old age is very resilient.

GRAND M begins to think very hard while LITTLE R advances in an irritating way, allowing her corsage to come in contact with GRAND M's allergenic zone. GRAND M sneezes explosively and we hear an offstage KNOCK KNOCK. M. WOOLF: (violently falsetto) "Grandmère oh grandmère. It is Little Red Riding Hood come to visit. Grandmère oh grandmère please let me in. Aooww."

GRAND M: (sneezing) An idea! I have an idea! Your corsage has sharpened the blades of my intelligence! Into the armoire Little Red Riding Hood and don't let me hear you breathe! You will find a well-honed axe on your right-hand side. Achoo! Ha ha! Achoo! These sneezes will save our lives!

LITTLE R, hyperventilating, scrambles into the armoire just in time to avoid the entrance of M. WOOLF ("Grandmère oh grandmère"), heavily costumed in a cerise tablecloth and a cotton-wool bib. In this disguise, M. WOOLF could fool no one.

GRAND M: Ah my darling little girl. My own daughter's child laden with goodies for her shortsighted and arthritic relative. What's in the basket, kiddo, I'M HUNGRY.

M. WOOLF: Oooh dear grandmozzer. I was in such a hurry to arrive zat I forgot to look in ze basket. (He flips quickly through the top layer) But you weel immediately find plaisir in zees lovely flowers which I labored to gather for you.

GRAND M: Have you fallen on your head, Little Red Riding Hood? You *know* I'm violently allergic to *anything* that grows. ACHOO ACHOOO ACHOO. Why the moment I come into contact with chlorophyll (and here she touches a leaf) I break out in hideous pustules, boils filled with slime, wens, warts, carbuncles, and large purple spots! Look! Look! And anyone who touches me suffers the very same affliction.

M. WOOLF: (pulling back in horror) Do you mean, dear grandmozzer, zat I cannot embrace you, encompass you, put my, uh, mouse, moufe, mout, I *can*not say zis word but you know what I mean—ze area below my nose—cannot

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kees your beautiful wizzered cheek? Your neck full of exquisite veins running in blood? (M. WOOLF's bib fills with saliva)

GRAND M: ACHOO Little Red Riding Hood ACHOO. Do you remember what happened the last time you approached me with a bouquet in hand?

M. WOOLF: Uh . . . I am a leetle vague on that subject, dear grandmozzer.

GRAND M: Why, we had to rush you right to the hospital, Little Red Riding Hood. Your lips swelled up like soccer balls, your eyes looked like fresh pamplemousse, even your ears were affected. (peers) Why Little Red Riding Hood, I believe your ears are *still* affected. How very large they look.

M. WOOLF: The better to hear you with, ancient relative.

GRAND M: And your mouth. Surely you have had some serious dental work since your last visit? Your teeth seem twice as large as they once were.

M. WOOLF: No no dear grandmozzer. I assure you my teeth are in a terrible condition. (touches them) Aooww.

GRAND M: And your nose, dear child. What happened to your nose?

M. WOOLF: Eet is ze way of adolescence, grandmozzer dearest. You know how quickly one feature can outstrip anozzer in ze process of growth. And now I can smell you so much better. Snif snif. Snif snif. I can smell you *and* something else. Are you certain we are quite alone, dear grandmozzer? Snif snif.

GRAND M: I was expecting no one but you, granddaughter ACHOO ACHOO and now you have entirely forgotten my basket of presents which was so terribly important to me, living alone as I do so entirely and without consolation. SOB SOB.

GRAND M's loud, false sobs touch M. WOOLF as real emotion never could.

M. WOOLF: (to the audience) Oh my goodness, I deed not calculate ze effects of my avidity on ze old woman. Zis touches me very much, very much indeed. (GRAND M sobs louder) I sink I must kill ze poor thing quickly to put 'er out of 'er extreme misery. (GRAND M instantly cries more softly) But 'ow can I kill 'er if I cannot *touch* 'er?

GRAND M: Boo Hoo Hoo. Alone! Forsaken! Undernourished!

M. WOOLF: Eeet ees clearly time to reveal myself and accomplish ze classical deed, but all zis emotion is, 'ow you say in American business circles, keeling my appetite for power.

GRAND M: Poor poor poor grandmother with nothing but a distant daughter, an ingrate grandchild, and a dull collection of carving knives! Boo! Hoo! Hoo!

M. WOOLF: Really, I cannot tolerate zis display of emotion. Grandmozzer dear grandmozzer! Cease your crying! Desist from your depression! See! See! (he holds up the basket while rummaging through it) I have brought you 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, *six* bottles of, of zis maroon liquid to drink. And beneath them . . . Argh! A dead hen of some sort.

GRAND M: I believe that's a songbird, Little Red Riding Hood.

M. WOOLF: Whatever it is, dear grandmozzer, I am certain it will make some-

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one a very good meal. (M. WOOLF begins to drip a little) Now dry your dreadful tears and think about cooking.

GRAND M: I'd rather think about drinking, darling granddaughter. Your foolish flowers have begun to raise welts on my skin. See here and here.

M. WOOLF: Mon dieu! Could ze old dragon be correct? Her forearm looks anyway like a bas-relief map of the Pyrenées. (to GRAND M) Grandmozzer dearest. Eet ees true, zen. You are poisonous to ze touch?

GRAND M: Lay a hand on me, Little Red, and that hand will never again be the same.

M. WOOLF: Heureusement, my appetite is momentarily suppressed by ze old lady's histrionics and, besides, I 'ave already confessed it, my serious preference is for prepubescent cheeldren. SLURP DROOL. Mon dieu! Mon bib! Uh, grandmozzer. Whatever can I do to offer you consolation for zis hideous condition?

GRAND M: Open a bottle for me, Little Red, and allow me to drown my misery in fermented blackberry juices.

M. WOOLF: Eet seems a small sing to ask, dear grandmozzer, 'ere you are. (hands her a bottle)

GRAND M: Salut salope. (glug glug glug) Ahhh. Much much better. But when thirst is satisfied, hunger begins to speak. Or so we butchers always say.

LITTLE R sneezes in the armoire.

M. WOOLF: (freezes in a predatory attitude) *Aha*! Grandmozzer. Zere is someone in your armoire.

GRAND M: Is it possible?

M. WOOLF: Years of serious training 'ave allowed me to identify ze smallest sound of prospective prey. Eef only I could 'ear it again.

LITTLE R: ACHOO ACHOO

M. WOOLF: Merci.

GRAND M: (to the audience) The little fool is allergic to mothballs.

LITTLE R: ACHOO ACHOO ACHOO

M. WOOLF: Oh merci merci. Now zat, eef I am not mistaken, is a female sneeze in ze 11- to 15-year-old category. It is a blond sneeze, moreover, and more zan likely ze sneeze 'as blue eyes. Am I warm, dear grandmozzer?

GRAND M: You're running a temperature, Little Red Riding Hood.

M. WOOLF: I can only conclude, dear grandmozzer, zat in your armoire is concealed a dreadful, female imposter, 'oping to supplant me in your abundant affections.

GRAND M: Could it be M. *Woolf*, Little Red? Could it actually be the *big, bad, wolf* and could that *wolf* be a *female*?!!

M. WOOLF: Aoww. Aowwww. Even my name uttered by anozzer person affects me 'orribly. Wooooolf! Wooooolf! Aooow! Aooowww! Pardon dearest grandmozzer. I am overly excited. I sink we might 'ave located ze terrible M. (whispers) Woolf in your armoire. I must enter and vanquish him. Or 'er, in zis case.

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GRAND M: Go right ahead, darling granddaughter. I will sit here with my bottle and my needles and my knives at the ready.

M. WOOLF: At last! At last! My appetite will be satisfied! At last! Justice for ze Wolf! Aaaaoooowwww!!!!

M. WOOLF enters the armoire and GRAND M shouts: "On the *right*, Little Red. Remember the axe is on the *right* and the blade is *sharp*." And then GRAND M locks the armoire. We hear LITTLE R: "*Where* did you say that axe was, grandmère?!! On the *left?*" and horrible sounds of battle: "Take that! Beast!" "Aooww aowww." Fur, blood, and tufts of blond hair drift, spurt, and blow out of the closet. Suddenly all is silent. GRAND M approaches the closet and opens the door. LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD steps out, bloody axe in hand, hood seriously askew.

LITTLE R: I *did* it, grandmother dearest! I hacked the horrible M. Woolf into small steak-like pieces and, what is more, I did it at close range in a closet with a *very* dull instrument.

GRAND M: I could have *sworn* I had that axe sharpened.

LITTLE R: Alcohol, grandmère, has completely destroyed your mind. (begins to boast and strut) And not only, chère grandmère, did I accomplish this heroic deed under the very worst of conditions—to which you *heartlessly* exposed me—but I was even able to turn one of M. Woolf's own *signifiers* against him. To repeat, grandmère, I, Little Red Riding Hood, have *deconstructed* the Big, Bad Wolf.

GRAND M: (sarcastically) Oh brava brava granddaughter. What a blow, what a blow. Now, give me the axe, take this kettle, and catch what remains of the wolf's blood—and we will have sausages as well as songbirds for our breakfast.

LITTLE R: Ah, a boudin noir. I will do it with pleasure, dear grandmère. Your cooking has always been a lighthouse in the stormy seas of my childhood. Though to be frank, I think you use more wine in your sauces than is strictly necessary. (she smiles her insupportable smile and reenters the closet)

GRAND M: I don't know if I can support another decade of that smile.

LITTLE R: (from the armoire) Tee hee.

GRAND M: I can't see why I should put up with another year of that voice.

LITTLE R: (from the armoire) Oooooooo. Yuck.

GRAND M: I don't feel I can *stand* another *second* of that *attitude.*

LITTLE R: (from the armoire) Oh grandmère you would not *believe* the mess M. Woolf has made in your armoire. Really, it is *too awful.*

GRAND M: (stroking her needles) It wouldn't be infanticide. Not at her age. She's just at the point where I might even be *congratulated* for . . . . . (a trickle of blood flows out from under the armoire door) Ahh the blood. The *blood.* Once the blood starts flowing, there's no telling what direction it will run in. Or so we butchers always say. Heh heh heh. Appetite comes with eating. *Another* thing we butchers always say. Heh heh heh. Come out! Come out my dear! You've collected quite enough blood now. Come out and join

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your aged grandmother for a little nap before cooking. Or eating. Whichever applies. Heh heh heh.

GRAND M's teeth seem to lengthen as LITTLE RED emerges with the kettle of blood.

LITTLE R: Here is your full kettle, chère grandmère, but I fear there is as much saliva as blood in it. M. Woolf was *not* a very fastidious animal and in the closet the two fluids just seemed to run together.

GRAND M: Put it down here, Little Red Riding Hood, and give me your cloak. My my. I feel overcome by an immense fatigue.

LITTLE RED: It's the wine, I'm afraid. And your very great age, grandmère.

GRAND M: (to the audience) Really, I marvel at the wolf's self-control. How could he not kill her immediately. All right, Little Red, hop into bed, next to the wall where you will be warmed and protected.

LITTLE R: (to the audience) Did I not tell you what a remarkable woman my grandmother was?

GRAND M: That's right, little one. In you go. Hee hee hee.

Suddenly the spirit of Djuna Barnes appears in the famous profile portrait by Berenice Abbot. The spirit points to the bed and says with an evil intention: "Children know something they can't tell. They like Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in bed."

GRAND M: Now let me sing you a little slumber song. Something I used to sing for you when you were a very *little* Little Red Riding Hood.

LITTLE R: (yawning visibly) Oh grandmother dearest. Maman says you never got through a lullaby in your whole life. You were always far too gone in alcohol, maman says. (yawn) My, there is nothing like murder to relax the limbs and senses.

GRAND M: *Now* you sound like my own real granddaughter. At *last* you sound like a real Hood. It's quite late, of course, *too* late really, but it's very nice to hear.

LITTLE R: And is Hood your surname as well, chère grandmère? I've never really known *what* name you choose to go by. (yawn)

GRAND M: Hood is really more of a condition than a name, Little Red. Now close your little eyes and grandmother will sing you a lullaby to finish the day.

LITTLE R: (yawn) Where is the blood, grandmère? Where is the blood I extracted from M. Woolf? (yawn)

GRAND M: It is just here in the kettle under the bed, Little Red. Waiting to be used for a court bouillon.

LITTLE R: And the limbs of M. Woolf? And all that ugly fur?

GRAND M: All will be taken care of, I assure you my darling. I have a use for everything. Now close those little eyes and let grandmother sing you to a final sleep.

LITTLE R: Final, chère grandmère? What do you (yawn) mean by final?

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GRAND M: Close your eyes, Little Red Riding Hood and listen.
Life is grotesque
A terrible thing
Love is a joke
Choked by a ring
The Wolf is alive
Under everyone's bed
And you would be better off DEAD
Little Red
You would be better off DEAD.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD is snoring gently by lullaby's end.

GRAND M: Now let me see. Where was I? Ah yes, the blackberry wine. A perfet accompaniment to meat. *Certain* kinds of meat. Or so we butchers always say. Now where are my knives and my knitting needles?

As the lights dim, GRANDMOTHER is backlit in murderous silhouette, plunging her sharpened needles over and over and over again into the increasingly lifeless form of LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD.

Suddenly, the image of Roland Barthes appears, driving an ambulance. It circles the set once, steps out of the cab, tries to make sense of the scene it sees, shudders, thinks, shudders again, shrugs its shoulders, remounts the truck and drives off. From offstage we hear the sounds of the stagehands killing each other in bloody battle over the meaning of what we've just seen. Cries of: "Structure! *I'll* give you structure! POW!" and "What do you *mean* the wolf was the protagonist! BLAM!" echo through the set. GRANDMOTHER, back in her rocking chair, plies her yarnless needles as the battle sounds roll over her and blood from the bed stains the floor around her chair.

The set goes slowly and deliberately to black.

FINIS

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